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ON THE COVER
Minnesota United FC soccer star Collin Martin is the first active, openly gay male athlete in all of America's pro sports leagues.
Photo by Mike Hnida

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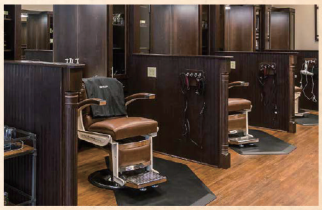

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FROM THE EDITOR | BY CHRIS TARBOX

A Touchdown For The Rainbow Community

I'm going to be completely honest here: I'm not the pinnacle of athletic skill. Although I played football and softball as a kid, I was—how can I phrase this?—not good at it. As such, sports were never my forte ("sporte"?), but nonetheless, sports are a huge part of our social fabric, and it's especially integral to the GLBT community at large.

For the 2018 Sports & Fitness Issue, Lavender tees off with an interview with Minnesota United FC soccer star Collin Martin, who recently came out to become the only active openly gay player in American pro soccer. We also celebrate Minnesota's winners at the 2018 Gay Games in Paris, and we profile the rainbow-friendly online athletic wear company Prideletics.

We also meet the folks at the Minnesota Senior Sports Association, and we interview Capt. Tyler Bieniek of the Minnesota National Guard. Also, a heads up to our readers: nominations for our 2018 *Lavender* Community Awards are underway! If you know an individual, an organization, or a company that has done great work for the GLBT community in the past year, be sure to send your submissions by Monday, Nov. 19! ∎

A WORD IN EDGEWISE | BY E.B. BOATNER

Sports and Activity—Goals Yet Unattained

I have friends that hike, that ski, scuba. They trek and cycle in foreign lands through wet and cold and sun and rain. I applaud them, I admire them, but I neither envy, nor seek to surpass or even equal them. I'm more what one might call a "stasist" than an activist. Not everyone can be a mover and shaker.

Emily Dickinson, from the fastness of her Amherst, Massachusetts, room wrote:

"There is no frigate like a book,
To take us Lands away
Nor any Coursers like a Page
Of prancing Poetry –
This Traverse may the poorest take
Without Excess of Toll –
How frugal is the Chariot
That bears the Human Soul –"

Dickinson crossed the Massachusetts border twice, visiting her Congressman father in Washington, D.C. and stopping briefly with Philadelphia relatives. Eventually, she avoided face-to-face encounters altogether, corresponding via letters with a select few.

I enjoy traveling, despite its "Excess of Toll", preferring to visit the same cities (Paris, Amsterdam), walking their streets and byways with my camera. But I'm rarely active or sportive. On cold or rainy days, I snug up in my hotel and board one of the many frigates berthed on my iPad.

On my recent vacation—my first time in the U.K.—there were numerous rainy, windy days to recline and voyage internally. In addition to my camera equipment, I'd loaded Ron Chernow's 800-page biography, *Hamilton*, on my iPad. While not exactly Dickinson's "frugal Chariot", today's miracle widgets can pack a veritable fleet of frigates into a few electronic ounces. We are allowed journeys within journeys undreamed of in Dickinson's day. Born in 1830, she was closer in time to Alexander Hamilton (d. 1804) than to us. And, not until reading about him as the Highland rain pattered down, did I learn that he, unlike the peripatetic Franklin, Adams, and Jefferson, had never ventured across the Atlantic.

This essay is not a paean to sports and activity so much as an acknowledgment that we each explore the world as best suits our temperament. Some within a single room, others world-wide, with bursts of energy and feats of derring-do. My Fitbit tends to flatline, and sometimes I question whether the active actually live longer or whether it just feels that way. ∎

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BY CHRIS TARBOX

A DAY in the Life

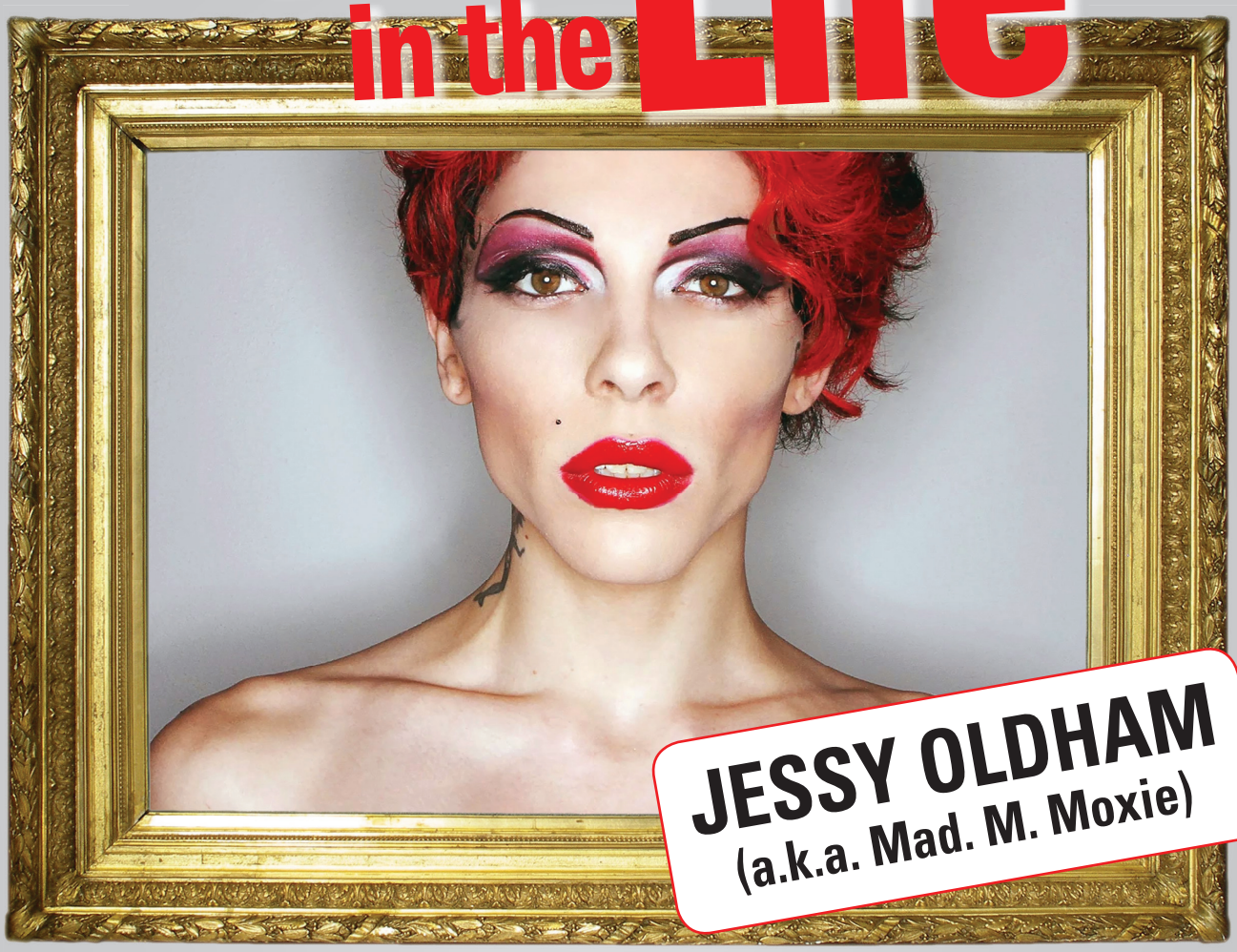

Photo courtesy of Jessy Oldham

JESSY OLDHAM (a.k.a. Mad. M. Moxie)

Name: Jessy Oldham, Mad. M. Moxie

Where did you grow up? Lake City, MN, though I was a foster child who bounced around a bunch.

Where do you live? I now live in Minneapolis.

Who do you live with? I have one roommate.

What is your occupation? I do drag shows, make costumes, do stand up and teach burlesque lessons. I work for myself, but my boss is crazy.

When did you come out? I came out pretty early in life, about 11 or 12.

How'd that go? It seemed to confuse my mother, my sisters were quite accepting. I had an uncle who used to beat the living hell out of me pretty regularly for being femme. This went on for a few years.

When do you wake up? I have a horrid sleep cycle, so whenever I open my eyes.

Phone alarm or old school alarm? I live by a school, so do loud kids count?

Breakfast? Beer.

Coffee? By the gallon.

Cream or no? No, I like my coffee how I like my magick.

How do you spend your commute? Trying to find whatever I want to work on that day.

If your job were like a yearbook, what would you be voted? (Class clown, best dressed, most annoying, etc.) Most likely to die an early death.

What inspires you? Sometimes life openly and unabashedly sucks. I find inspiration in finding ways to counter that. If I can bring someone joy, that too inspires me.

Do you eat your lunch while working or take a break? I just like eating.

Is your work space tidy or a hot mess? Much like me, my work space is a hot mess.

What's been your favorite job? Burlesque.

Who are your heroes? Elvira, Morticia, Leslie Hall, Blondie, and so many more.

Favorite weeknight meal: Go out, take out, or cook in? Take out.

Most embarrassing moment: One time at a show I accidentally took some LSD. I was tripping so hard and trying to act like everything was fine. I ended up doing the whole show, and on my way backstage I fell in front of all the other queens and popped one of my breasts.

On a usual weeknight, you are doing what? Stuffing my face, playing video games, writing, or singing to piss off the neighborhood.

Bedtime: When I pass out.

Favorite weekend activity: Spending time with my friends and loved ones.

What are you most proud of and why? I made it this far, I have seen a lot of pain and abuse in my life. I have a driving force inside to help others see their strength too.

Words of wisdom to share:

Sometimes life will give you the best hand, and you will still lose.

Sometimes life will give you a terrible hand, and you can still win.

Sometimes life will hold out your hands, and just poop in them.

But even still, it's your choice to grow a flower. ■

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Interact Theatre has developed a longstanding reputation as one of America's foremost theaters featuring the work of performers with disabilities. The troupe has been invited to be a part of the Guthrie Theater's Level 9 series, which deals with challenging sociopolitical questions. But if you're looking to simply be entertained, the reprise of their 2011 hit, *Hot Funky Butt Jazz*, is a sure bet. Formerly titled *Hot Jazz at da Funky Butt*, we are transported to New Orleans, the jazz capital, for a deeper look at the art form known as "jazz". The title comes from the historic Union Son's Hall, a church/community center that once upon a time transformed into the Funky Butt Jazz Hall at midnight, when sweaty bodies moved sensually to what was then perceived as a provocative new sound over a century ago.

That sound is often credited to ragtime and "jass" cornetist Buddy Bolden. ("Jass" prefigures the word, "jazz".) This African-American music innovator was known as the King of Jazz and was central to the New Orleans scene of the first decade of the 20th century. Bolden's band is thought to have been the first wherein brass instruments played the blues. He pushed the envelope by approaching ragtime with an improvisational attitude which added the blues element. He incorporated the gospel tradition of Baptist churches along with the muscular power that military marching band music emanates. Bolden would have been well aware of John Philip Sousa.

Level 9 features vocalist Zena Moses, keyboard artist Eugene Harding, and Jeremy Phipps on horn, all of whom are experts in the New Orleans style. Jeff Haas, a veteran of the Minneapolis gay theater scene of the 1990s, is also in the thick of it all, and sews queer threads into to the jazzy fabric. He says of the character he plays, "Coco is supposed to be a old tired queen who also has a bite to her. But at the same time she is supposed to be likable and sympathetic. I've never done drag before. It would be easier if I was a method actor. I've been told to find my inner Coco." Be assured, however, Haas is another sure bet. His Artists Shakespeare Company was acclaimed for its crossgender portrayals a generation ago, and his camp performance in Robert Patrick's *Pouf Positive* for Out on the Town Theatre was absolutely delicious.

THE LARAMIE PROJECT: TEN YEARS LATER

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Uprising Theatre takes us back 10 years ago to the 10th anniversary of the famous play collaboration that reflected on the brutally torturous death of gay college student Matthew Shepard. Tied to a fence post on the outskirts of Laramie, Wyoming in October 1998, he was beaten mercilessly and died six days later. A month afterward, New York's Tectonic Theater Project went there to interview townspeople and out of this created a play titled *The Laramie Project*, overseen by Moises Kaufman. Then ten years later, Tectonic members returned to find out, from their perspective, how they perceived the town had changed (or not) over the decade. It is this piece that Uprising will present at the Howard Conn Fine Arts Center. Theatrically, both *The Laramie Project* works exist in the vein of other gay-inclusive works like *A Chorus Line* and *Gross Indecency: The Three Trials of Oscar Wilde* (also created by Kaufman in 1997) in which actual interviews and correspondence are shaped into a theatrical text.

Though there's no doubt that Aaron McKinney and drug dealer Russell Henderson murdered Shepard, various perspectives have competed with one another about the actual motivations at play. Was he targeted for being gay or was it a robbery that spun out of control? Drug abuse is thought to have figured considerably into the madness that ensued. Kristen Price and Chastity Pasley, the girlfriends of the murderers, were charged as accessories to the crime. McKinney's lawyer put forth the gay panic defense justified by the assertion that Shepard placed his hand on McKinney's knee, hence, signaling intent to commit sexual assault, but the judge rejected it. Price ultimately recanted her statement that Shepard allegedly made sexually advances on her boyfriend and told television interviewer Elizabeth Vargas that she didn't think it was actually a hate crime. Price had originally told Detective Ben Fritzen that McKinney was triggered by homophobia. Fritzen expressed reservations about the murder being a hate crime.

Shepard had been raped and beaten in Morocco, which elicited depression in what is said to have been a previously optimistic personality. He was hospitalized at points for clinical depression and considered suicide. Friends felt these unresolved traumas influenced the illicit drug use he explored in college.

Seven actors will play 150 characters in *The Laramie Project: Ten Years Later* co-directed by Sarah Catcher and Ashley Hovell. Earlier this year Uprising produced a compelling production of its founder/artistic director Shannon TL Kearns's remarkable trans-themed play, *Twisted Deaths*, directed by Hovell. The theater company is clearly committed to works that deal with social justice from a queer perspective, so the Shepard murder is something that fits into their mission.

Hovell says that "in conversation about the death of Matthew Shepard, I hear people say 'Thank god that doesn't happen anymore. We've come so far.' The thing is, hate crimes do continue to happen. Twenty years after Matthew's death, Uprising Theatre feels a need to bring Matthew's story to the forefront once again to remind people that hate crimes are still happening."

MARY POPPINS

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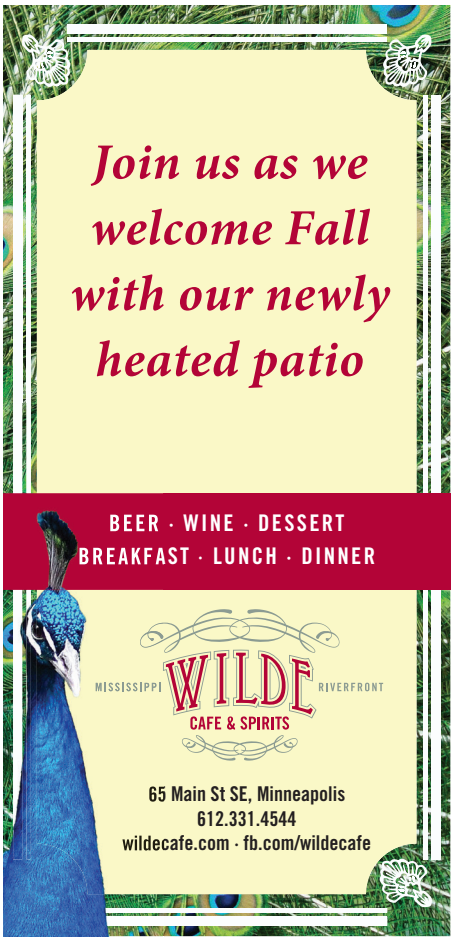
If you've followed Joel Sass's directorial/design work over the decades, you know that he is a brilliant navigator of the fantastical. From his own Mary Worth Theatre Company staging of Clive Barker's *The History of the Devil* a generation ago, right up to his Theater Latte Da staging of *Peter and the Starcatcher,* named by *Lavender* as one of last year's Top 10 productions, Sass is a genius at delving into what spiritualists call "the invisible realm". Both of those memorable productions showcased his understanding of the polarities of light and dark. Therefore, he is an ideal choice to direct *Mary Poppins*, in which those polarities interrelate.

That may sound odd if the 1964 Disney film is your only source of the *Poppins* story, but the original P.J. Travers source isn't quite so spoonful sugary. The same can be said of the writer of the book for the musical, Julian Fellowes (*Gosford Park, Downton Abbey*), now on stage at Artistry Theater. Robert Stevenson directed that winner of 13 Oscar nominations with bright and bubbly beauty and it looms as a masterpiece on its own terms. However, in contrast, the stage musical version has a deeply aching sense of the splintering of a nuclear family that surpasses the film. Hence, the character Mary Poppins' intervention has an added sense of poignancy.

Becca Hart plays the title role. C. Ryan Shipley plays the lovable chimney sweep, Bert. Brandon Jackson, who was named as *Lavender*'s Best Supporting Musical Actor for Minneapolis Musical Theatre's *Leap of Faith* in 2016 and who wowed audiences with his uproarious crossgender performance as Motormouth Maybelle in Artistry's *Hairspray* the year before, will surely delight once again in his crossgender take on Miss Andrew, the strenuously strict nanny who once looked after the patriarch of the story's family, Mr. Banks (Charlie Clark) in childhood. The choreography has been created by Joe Chvala, another *Lavender* best from years past.

Continued on page 14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www.openeyetheatre.org

The legend of Faust, the man who sells his soul to the devil has been re-interpreted by various writers over the centuries. We've all heard of the reference, "a Faustian bargain". Distinguished puppet artist Michael Sommers has created a new production of his *A Prelude to Faust*, first commissioned by the Walker Art Center in 1998 for a new revival at Open Eye Theatre. Sommers's particular source is the poetic drama *Faust* by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, which ranks as one of German literature's towering works. It was written in two parts: the first was completed in 1808 and revised in 1828-29; the second in 1831.

This 20th Anniversary production features Julian McFaul, who created the role originally and who has performed it in all subsequent revivals. Sommers went all the way to Germany and Czech Republic to conduct research for the piece. Acclaimed theater composer Michael Koerner, renowned for his scores at the Children's Theatre and Theatre de la Jeune Lune, contributes to a reprise of the piece that we've been signaled has "ecstatic violence and a more intensely heartbreaking love story."

THE TEMPEST

Through Nov. 17
SpringHouse Ministry Center, 610 W. 28th St.
Minneapolis
800-838-3006
www.theatrecoupdetat.com

The Tempest is one of William Shakespeare's later plays and is definitely more mystical than most. It is the work of a man looking back at life from a point of wisdom and reassessment. Themes of parenting, power, and letting go of set patterns permeate this beautiful play that is actually categorized by many scholars as a romantic comedy. However, it is notable in modern terms it is frequently thought of as a personality study of an older, aging man.

That said, eight years ago Helen Mirren played the lead role of Prospero, a man, as a woman, renamed Prospera in the Julie Taymor film version. Theatre Coup d'Etat is doing the same with Meri Golden in the role on stage. In 2012, Golden astounded audiences with her performance as the nurse in the Coup's *Romeo and Juliet*. It was one of the best performances of that classic role one could have ever imagined. She also blew audiences away earlier this year in Candid Theater's *Peter and Alice*, as the woman on whom Lewis Carroll based his title character of *Alice in Wonderland* in her later years.

Of *The Tempest*, Golden tells us, "Actually, I am going to be playing Prospero as a woman—a woman of intellect wrongly ousted out of her legitimate position of power. We will be exploring misogyny in the play, as 'King' Alonso will be played by a woman (Sue Gerber): the male conspirators will be trying to overturn both the female rulers. Playing Prospero, I hope to show how power is tempered by vulnerability, but 'Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned'—in this case not by a lover, but by her brother's usurping her position and banishing her. We will be showing women in the play as both innocent and culpable, as well as capable of forgiveness. Also, there will be aggressive male characters seeking power at all costs, as well as men who are compassionate and sometimes vulnerably foolish. Caliban's attempted rape of Miranda—and Prospero's reaction to it—should resonate in the current climate, and Prospero's views on nature vs. nurture are still controversial today." ▮

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SCORING A GOAL FOR THE GLBT COMMUNITY

Collin Martin came out as gay earlier this year, and has been praised by fellow players and the gay community for his honesty and assertiveness.
Photo courtesy of Minnesota United FC

By Kassidy Tarala

Minnesota United soccer player Collin Martin shares his experience of coming out to teammates and fans.

The only openly gay male athlete in Major League Soccer and in any of the big five American sports leagues, Collin Martin proudly represents the GLBT community as a player for the Minnesota United FC. Though Martin wasn't always comfortable sharing his sexuality with the public, he is now an inspiration to GLBT individuals around the world, from fellow athletes to fans.

Martin grew up in Maryland with two brothers and two sisters, and he found his passion and talent for soccer at the age of two. Since then, Martin has been kicking the ball down a long road of success. Martin went on to study at Wake Forest University for a year before being contracted on the MLS team in Washington D.C at the age of 18. Martin played for them for four seasons and joined the Minnesota United two years ago.

"The assistant coach at D.C. United got a job offer to move to Minnesota United, and he had known me for a long time and wanted to bring me with him," Martin says. "I was in need of a fresh start, so I thought it would be great."

Martin says he started to realize he was gay in elementary school, but he found it really difficult to express his sexuality in middle and high school while also being an athlete. He says it was hard to understand the balance between his masculine side as a soccer player and the fact that he wasn't quite like his fellow teammates.

"It wasn't too hard keeping it a secret because I was dating girls and talking about girls to teammates, so it was easy to keep up that charade," Martin says. "I didn't give myself a chance to explore, and I wish I had been completely myself in high school. Things would have been a lot different if I was comfortable sharing that I was attracted to men."

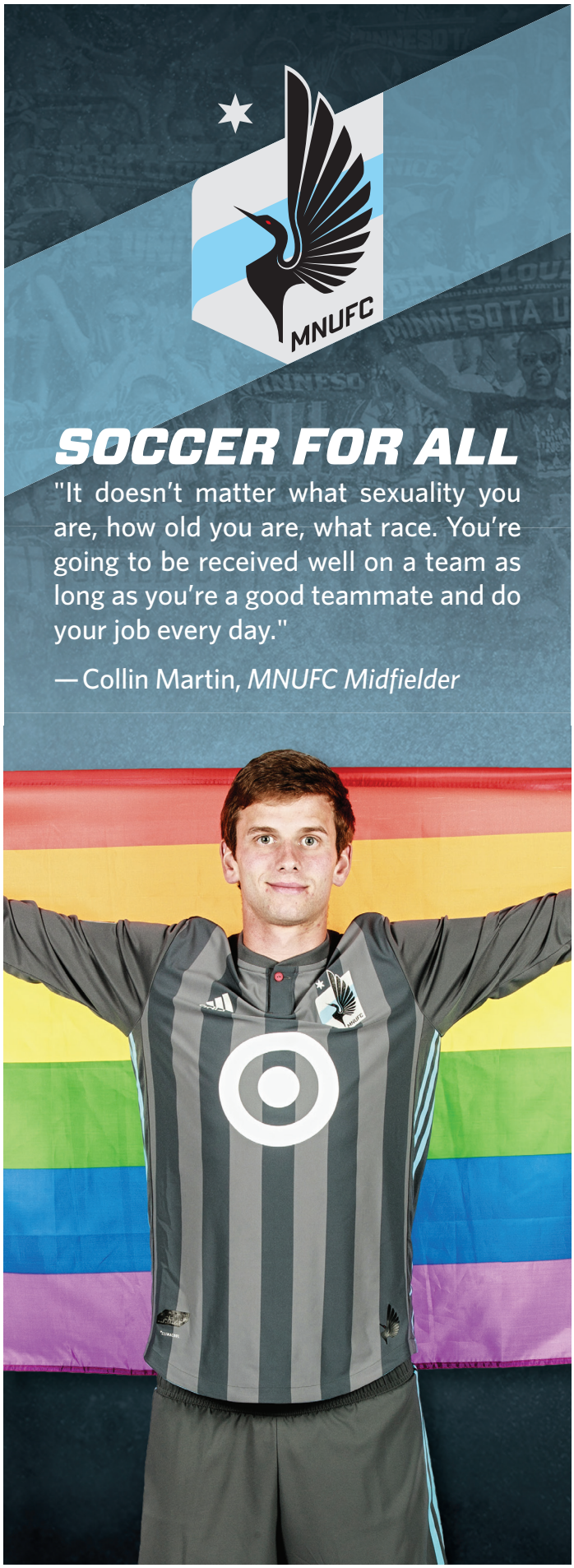
Martin says he told some of his close teammates in D.C. that he's gay along with family members and close friends. He didn't come out publicly until he moved to Minnesota, which was largely because of his team's participation in Playing for Pride.

"Playing for Pride (was) started by a man in North Carolina who plays professional soccer who got people on pro soccer teams in America to pledge their money and support to the GLBT community, and proceeds went to Athlete Ally," Martin says. "I had a person ask me why I was participating in Playing for Pride, and at first I was not able to answer, and then I realized it was a great opportunity to explain that I'm proud to be myself and to represent the team as a gay man."

Martin says he used the 2018 Pride game to open up to everyone, which is when he came out publicly. He says he also would bring his boyfriend at the time to team events, parties, and games, which all of his teammates were supportive of.

After coming out, Martin received love and support from people all over the world, which encouraged Martin to continue proudly representing the community in his sport.

"It was amazing, and the support was incredible. The reach that my message got was something I never would have imagined," he says.



SOCCER FOR ALL

"It doesn't matter what sexuality you are, how old you are, what race. You're going to be received well on a team as long as you're a good teammate and do your job every day."

—Collin Martin, *MNUFC Midfielder*

"Clearly to this day, being gay in professional sports is very taboo, but people are very interested in my story. There is still such a lack of representation in sports, and being a gay man and being a soccer player, I didn't know what I was getting myself into."

Martin says the reaction he received has been overwhelmingly positive, including messages from all over the world expressing appreciation for his openness and for being willing to share.

Though the general reaction to Martin's coming out has been extremely positive, Martin says that our society—specifically in terms of sports—has a long way to go.

"The real goal is that people won't have to do this. I didn't realize this was something I needed to do because I always thought that there were already amazing pioneers who sacrificed and did this before, so I wouldn't have to," Martin says. "But we still have a lot of progress that needs to be made in a lot of areas. When I started to wrap my head around the idea that I'm an example for others, that was huge."

Martin says his message has resonated with many GLBT fans, and people are realizing that, "Hey, people in sports are amazing and they will accept you, this is a place for everyone." He says he doesn't want anyone to feel like they don't have a spot in sports.

Overall, Martin says that coming to Minnesota gave him the ability to meet a team of incredibly accepting individuals, to find a strong community in the Twin Cities, and to realize that he can be one of the very pioneers that he once looked up to.

"I'm really appreciative of Minnesota and the strong GLBT community and supporters that I've come across. Coming from D.C. to Minnesota has been very uplifting to feel supported in the community and to see everyone come together," he says. "I'm really excited to get involved with everyone in the community and continue representing the community in sports." ∎

Collin Martin hopes that his coming out will encourage other gay athletes to be open with their sexuality.
Photo courtesy of Minnesota United FC

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Members of Team Minnesota were present for the opening ceremony of the Gay Games in Paris.
Photo by Signe Harriday

PUTTING THE "GAY" IN GAMES

Minnesota athletes win big at this year's Gay Games in Paris from Aug. 4 through Aug. 12.

By Kassidy Tarala

Every four years, some of the world's best GLBT athletes come together to compete in the Gay Games and to celebrate a competition that is dedicated to advocating for diversity and inclusion. Athletes come from all over the world to compete in a variety of sporting events, and this year was one Minnesota will never forget. The Bold Northers who represented Minnesota at this year's games in Paris included Paul Mittelstadt, who won silver in the triathlon, and the Subversive Sirens, a synchronized swim team that won gold.

The Subversive Sirens synchronized swimming team won the Gold medal at the 2018 Gay Games on behalf of Minnesota. Photo courtesy of Nicki McCracken

Mittelstadt grew up on a farm in southern Minnesota where he says the main form of physical activity was farm work, and a lot of it. Because his father kept him busy with work on the family farm, Mittelstadt said he had little time for recreational activities or sports in high school. Now, Mittelstadt is letting out some of that athletic energy.

"When I was 39, I decided I wanted to do my first sprint triathlon, which is half the distance of a regular triathlon," he says. "Since then, biking has become my favorite year-round sport."

His first triathlon in the Gay Games was in 1998 in Amsterdam, followed by the 2002 games in Sydney, and the 2006 games in Montreal. After missing the 2010 and 2014 games, Mittelstadt was ready to give his all at the 2018 Gay Games in Paris.

"It was nice to attend and finish second at the Paris Gay Games with family and friends waiting at the finish line, each with red pompons greeting me as I finished," Mittelstadt says.

In total, there were more than 90 participants in the triathlon sprint and 189 in the full triathlon, Mittelstadt included.

"It was 93 degrees the day of the event. The swimming went well as the water felt good. The biking went well also because the breeze felt so comfortable. The running in 93 degree temperature was exhausting and felt better when it was done," he says. "Being the second oldest participant in this event, I was glad to still be able to finish. Another person I did most of my running with was five years younger. He and I had time to share our stories."

Mittelstadt says the Gay Games truly promote inclusion as they are participatory rather than competitive to encourage unity among participants.

Like Mittelstadt, the Subversive Sirens made a splash at this year's Gay Games. Bringing home the gold in synchronized swimming, the Subversive Sirens made their name known at their first ever Gay Games.

Founders Signe Harriday and Suzy Messerole decided to create Subversive Sirens when Harriday revealed that it had always been her dream to participate in the Gay Games. Soon, the team was formed, including members Tana Hargest, Zoe Hollomon, and Nicki McCracken, and the mission of the team was determined.

"We are aware that there exists a mainstream narrative that excludes black and queer folks all the time, and that includes synchro—a sport that centers (on) whiteness and a certain body type. We love our bodies, and we're saying that one body type or style isn't more important than another," Harriday says. "Stereotypes seek to narrow our imagination and limit what we think is possible about other people. We are breaking stereotypes so that there can be more room for people to be free. That is why Black Liberation is central to what we do."

Harriday says the definition of subversive is "seeking or intended to subvert an established system or institution", which for the Subversive Sirens means dismantling white supremacy and other systems that seek to silence minorities.

MINNESOTA'S BIG WINNERS AT THE 2018 GAY GAMES

- **D Rojas and Debra Rojas,** Gold Medal in Bowling (Women's Doubles)
- **Debra Rojas,** Bronze Medal in Bowling (Women's Singles)
- **Paul Mittelstadt,** Silver Medal in Triathlon
- **Lindsey Kopp,** Bronze Medal in Swimming
- **Subversive Sirens,** Gold Medal in Synchronized Swimming (Team)
- **Signe Harriday and Suzy Messerole,** Silver Medal in Synchronized Swimming (Duet)
- **MN Gray Duck Soccer Team,** Bronze Medal in Soccer

"We triumphantly denounce those notions and systems. We are swimming our way into liberation with joy," Harriday says.

All five members of the team participated in the routine that won the Subversive Sirens gold. Harriday and Messerole also won silver in their duet performance, which included a technical routine and a free artistic routine.

Messerole says the Gay Games are meaningful to the Subversive Sirens because they offer an atmosphere that is accepting of everyone and celebratory of both sports and the GLBT community.

"Being in the water with other queer synchronized swimmers from around the world was like bathing in the waters of love. Athletes cheered for each other, supported each other, made space for each other (literally, in warm ups) and championed everyone's success," Messerole says. "Whether it was welcoming first time competitors—like us—or swooning over a duet by two Olympic caliber swimmers (men who should have competed in the Olympics but were banned because men aren't allowed to compete in synchronized swimming at the Olympic level)—this was a place of joy."

For more information about the Gay Games, visit gaygames.org. ∎

APPAREL AS PROUD AS THE ATHLETES

Paul Rodriguez discusses his passion and pride behind GLBT sportswear company Prideletics.

By Kassidy Tarala

For many people, getting laid off from work can be world-shattering. When Paul Rodriguez was let go from his job at the age of 23, he felt hopeless and lost. What was he to do with all of this free time? Not wanting to spend his days binge-watching old shows on Netflix, he realized the only thing he could do was follow his passions: sports, clothing and his love for his community. And in that moment, Prideletics was born.

Prideletics opened its online store last fall. Photo by Tracy Walsh Photography

"Ever since I was a kid, I played sports. Sports were always on the TV growing up, and I was that kid who played basketball in the winter, baseball in the summer, and football in the fall. The sports I played rotated around a bit as I grew up, but I had always loved that competitive atmosphere," Rodriguez says. "That includes going to professional sporting events. Growing up in Wisconsin, I went to plenty Milwaukee Bucks and Milwaukee Brewers games. Even now, I try to go to as many Gophers, Twins, Timberwolves, and MN United games as possible."

While sports were no foreign concept to Rodriguez, he says he never had any professional experience in apparel design, but his passion for style and clothing inspired him to pursue an athletic clothing line.

Rodriguez says he came out his junior year of college and joined the Twin Cities Goodtime Softball League, the local GLBT softball league, with a good friend the following summer.

"We were both terrified but knew it would be a great place to enjoy sports with people who would accept us for us. I have now been in the league for four years and have made lifelong friends from it," he says. "The sports family that has come from the league really has let me feel comfortable with who I am. I'm not scared anymore. I have this athletic community that loves me for who I am and I'm proud to be in the league."

In addition to athletics, Rodriguez kept himself busy in college at the University of Minnesota with a degree in strategic communications, which incorporated advertising and public relations. He says the skills he learned with that degree allowed him to understand what it takes to create websites, design graphics, run marketing campaigns, and interact with people through social media.

Lastly, Rodriguez's love for shopping and style helped point him in the direction of what was to become Prideletics.

"I love shopping, and I love clothes. It's a simple one, but it's the truth. I even had a job at the Mall of America in college, taking the light rail an hour each way because I just loved the retail atmosphere," Rodriguez says. "It made sense to combine all three of these into something that didn't exist. The Prideletics store officially launched in the fall of 2017."

The mission of Prideletics is to create high-quality clothing products that everyone can wear with pride. This campaign is meant to inspire moments of pride, spark authentic connections, and, most importantly, build a community of support for all, according to Rodriguez.

Prideletics offers athletic clothing and accessories that celebrate pride in a modern way. Rodriguez says the company started with just t-shirts but has quickly expanded to baseball tees, sweatshirts, snapbacks, beanies, and more. The collection will continue to expand to new items and designs, he added.

"Everything within Prideletics is designed by me. I don't have a professional graphic design background, but growing up I loved to edit photos with Photoshop. I would swap my head on celebrities. I would swap my friend's head with mine and post it to Facebook because it was hilarious," Rodriguez says. "Eventually, that evolved into teaching myself some graphic design skills that would later be used in my professional career, like on the Prideletics website, social media, apparel, and more."

Rodriguez says it's his dream to eventually open a brick-and-mortar store.

"Having an online store is great for reaching a wider audience, but having a physical location to call home would make everything even more real. I have some ideas that I hope to pursue in the future," he says.

Above all, though, Rodriguez says the main purpose of Prideletics is to serve the GLBT community and encourage everyone to be proud of who they are.

"Whether it's fear of being bullied by teammates or losing respect of a coach, it's scary to many. Organizations like the TCGSL help lots of people learn to accept who they are and be proud of it. It's what transformed me. Before I came out, I tried my best to act 'straight' everywhere I went. Now that I've found this LGBTQ sports family, I truly am never afraid," Rodriguez says. "I want to be like the people who helped me. Prideletics consists of a community that mirrors that thought."

For more information about Prideletics, visit www.prideletics.com. ∎

GLBT SPORTS DIRECTORY 2018-2019

By Chris Tarbox
Produced by Linda Raines

The Twin Cities area is home to a remarkable number of athletes who identify as members of the GLBT community. The sports range from soccer to basketball to Quidditch, and the teams are all welcoming and hard-working. Whether you want to join or watch a sport, here's a listing of what's out there and where to find out more about the local sports scene.

BASKETBALL

Women's Silver Fox Basketball League
Women (age 40+)
GLBT Specific? No
Season: Year-round?
Beginners welcome
Website: www.ywcampls.org/fitness_membership/womens_basketball_leagues

BOWLING

Hump Day Bowlers
Co-Ed
GLBT Specific? GLBT + Ally
Season: Sept.–March
Website: www.humpdaybowlers.com

Twin Cities Friday League
Co-Ed
GLBT Specific? GLBT + Ally
Season: Sept.–April
Website: www.facebook.com/twincitiesfridaybowling

Wednesday Rainbow League? – Twin Cities
Co-Ed
GLBT Specific? GLBT + Ally
Season: Sept.–April
Website: www.facebook.com/WednesdayRainbowLeague

CYCLING

Koochella Racing
Women
GLBT Specific? No
Website: koochella.com

FLAG FOOTBALL

Minnesota Gay Flag Football League (MNGFFL)
Co-Ed
GLBT Specific? No GLBTQ + Allies welcome
Season: Summer
Website: www.mngffl.com

FOOTBALL

Minnesota Machine? Women's Tackle Football
Women
GLBT Specific? No
Season: April–June
Website: www.mnmachine.com

Minnesota Vixen
Women
GLBT Specific? No
Season: April–June
Website: www.mnvixen.com

GOLF

Womyn's Twilight Golf League
Women
GLBT Specific? Yes
Season: Summer
Website: N/A

HOCKEY

Woman's Hockey Association of Minnesota
Women
GLBT Specific? No
Season: Oct.–March
Website: www.whamhockey.org

KICKBALL

Stonewall Kickball Minneapolis
Co-Ed (age 21+)
GLBT Specific? GLBT + Ally
Season: Spring and Fall Seasons
Website: stonewallminneapolis.leagueapps.com

OUTDOOR RECREATION

Outwoods
Co-Ed
GLBT Specific? Yes
Season: Year-round
Website: outwoods.org

QUIDDITCH

TC Frost
Co-Ed
GLBT Specific? No
Season: Year-round
Website: www.twincitiesqc.com ; www.usquidditch.org

RODEO

North Star Gay Rodeo Association
Co-Ed
GLBT Specific? Welcomes GLBT + Ally
Season: March-October IGRA circuit (local rodeo July at Dead Broke Arena, Hugo, MN)
Website: nsgra.org

ROLLER DERBY

TC Terrors—Minnesota Men's Roller Derby
Men 18+
GLBT Specific? No
Season: Nov.–April
Website: www.tcterrors.com

Minnesota RollerGirls
Women
GLBT Specific? No
Season: Oct.–April
Website: www.mnrollergirls.com

North Star Roller Derby
Women
GLBT Specific? No
Season: Nov.–April
Website: www.northstarrollerderby.com

RUGBY

Mayhem RFC
Men
GLBT Specific? GLBT + Ally
Season: April–Oct.
Website: www.mayhemrugby.org

Minnesota Valkyries Rugby
Women
GLBT Specific? No
Season: Aug.–June
Website: www.valkyriesrugby.org

RUNNING/WALKING

MSP Frontrunners
Running
Co-Ed
GLBT Specific? Yes
Season: Year-round
Website: www.mspfrontrunners.org

Prime Timers MSP
Walking
Older Men
GLBT Specific? Yes
Season: Year-round, first and third Saturdays each month
Website: primetimersww.org/ptmsp

SOCCER

TC Jacks Soccer Club
Co-Ed
GLBT Specific? Yes
Pick-up: May–Oct., League play: Year-round
Website: tcjacks.org

Minnesota Gray Ducks Soccer
Men's, Co-Ed, Women's
GLBT Specific? Yes
Tournaments: Year-round, League play: Year-round
Website: grayducks.com

SOFTBALL

Northern Lights Women's Softball League
Women
GLBT Specific? Yes
Season: May–Aug.
Website: nlwslmn.org

Twin Cities Goodtime Softball League
Men
GLBT Specific? Yes
Season: April–Aug.
Website: tcgsl.leagueapps.com

TENNIS

GLASS Tennis
Co-Ed
GLBT Specific? Yes
Season: Year-round
Website: glassports.org

VOLLEYBALL

GLASS Volleyball
Co-Ed
GLBT Specific? Yes
Season: Year-round
Website: glassports.org

Image courtesy of BigStock/Masson

SENIOR LIVING | BY KASSIDY TARALA

Photo courtesy of BigStock/Pressmaster

Age Is Just The Number On Your Jersey

Dick Anderson brings sports to seniors with Minnesota Senior Sports Association.

Anyone can be an athlete. That's the sentiment that Minnesota Senior Sports Association has used to build the organization that has been putting seniors on courts and fields that many haven't stepped foot on since their youth. By honoring and celebrating senior athletes, MSSA is shedding light on the fact that anyone can be an athlete… regardless of age.

MSSA President Dick Anderson says he has always been involved in senior softball, which is what sparked his interest in creating an organization for other seniors to get involved in sports, too. Five years ago, he and his friend and athlete Bob MacNamara founded MSSA to honor seniors who are active in sports after age 50.

"We do an annual banquet in the spring and a golf outing in the fall, and it's a 100 percent volunteer organization, not one penny goes to directors," Anderson says. "We usually honor eight to ten individuals at these events, and we have honored men's and women's teams, as well as individuals."

Anderson says MSSA has honored more men than women because many senior women grew up without the facilities and resources that men had to be able to participate in sports. Athletes have been honored in swimming, diving, track, softball, hockey, and even ping pong.

"We advocate for participation in sports, individual or team, after age 50 and award them for doing outstanding things statewide and nationally," Anderson says. "Last year, we had one guy who was 95 and from Duluth who still plays hockey every day with a crowd of young guys."

Anderson says they're always looking for new applicants and encourage all seniors to apply. As long as you're able to play, you can apply, he says.

Though no other sports organizations are directly involved in MSSA, Anderson says they help seniors get involved with outside sports organizations and teams. They encourage seniors to keep up with sports they once played, try a new sport, or look into information about local leagues. He says they often advertise local sports teams on their website to inform seniors of new opportunities.

"Go to our website if you don't know what is available, and if you have questions, you can try to connect with us, and we can get you connected with local teams," Anderson says. "If you're a senior who hasn't played sports but is interested in possibly picking one up now, I recommend that you just call your local recreational center. They can usually point you in the direction of other groups of seniors who you can get involved with and participate in sports where you might feel more comfortable."

Anderson says it's important to stay active as a senior, and sports leagues, teams, or even individual sports like tennis are a great way to do that. With the help of MSSA, more seniors are playing sports comfortably and confidently. Wear your age—and your jersey—proudly!

For more information about MSSA, visit mnseniorsports.com. ▮

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Coming Soon: Minnetonka

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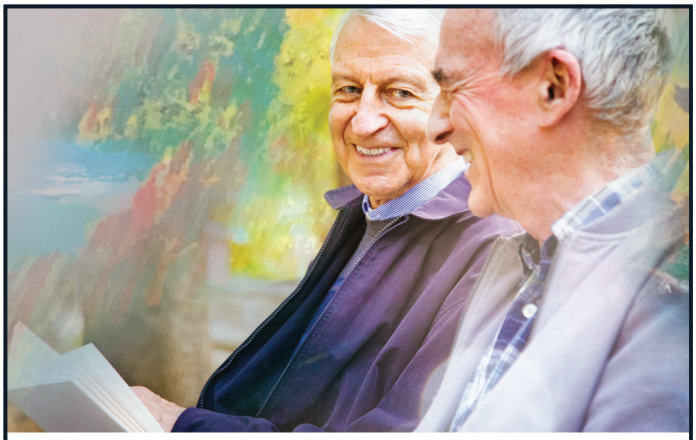

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LEATHER LIFE | BY STEVE LENIUS

MSDB Celebrates 20 Years

Minnesota Stocks, Debentures and Bonds (MSDB), a pansexual kink organization based in the Twin Cities, recently celebrated its twentieth anniversary. At a panel discussion held Sept. 4, 2018, at The Lab, the group's monthly educational presentation, some of the original board members reminisced about what has happened during those twenty years. Stories, laughter, and memories were shared, and it was a great chance for those in the audience with less time in the community to hear some interesting community history.

Panel participants were Charger, also known as Charger Pony, who was on the board for about ten years and was president for about five years; Claudia Pauline, one of the original board members; Keenan and Renae, who were never board members but who were stockholders (more about that later) and "grunt labor" for about five years; and Dan and Sassy, current board members who joined the board around 2003 and who will be leaving the board at the end of this year. Moderator was Doug, current MSDB board president.

Prior to 1998, when MSDB was formed, the gay male leather community had two local clubs, the Atons of Minneapolis and Black Guard of Minneapolis. Leather lesbians had their own local club, the Knights of Leather.

But the heterosexual/pansexual kink community intentionally remained below the radar. Local kinky folks communicated with each other through the BarDo Exchange, a computer bulletin board system (BBS). According to Claudia Pauline, "BarDo was started by people in professions who could lose their jobs if it was found out that they liked to do this stuff."

BarDo spawned several in-person kink groups. One group was invitation-only, but TIES (which stands for Tremendously Intense Erotic Situations) held private play parties and public monthly "munches" (social gatherings, usually at a restaurant). Both groups are still active.

Other groups and organizations spun off from these groups. But membership in the various groups often overlapped, and the groups were still supportive of each other because, as Claudia Pauline explained, "We were still a small community and didn't want to cut ourselves off from other parts of the community." Other areas of the country with larger kink communities were different: In many cases, if you belonged to this group, you didn't go to that group's events.

A lawyer in Iowa who was a friend of one of the MSDB founders thought that a for-profit model could work for a kink organization and created Iowa Stocks and Bonds (ISB). A group of people in Minnesota considered forming such a group and calling it Minnesota Stocks and Bonds. Then they realized that if they added another financial term, "Debentures," to the group's name, the initials for that name would be "MSDB," which is the reverse of "BDSM"—a happy accident. The Iowa lawyer prepared incorporation papers, and Minnesota Stocks, Debentures and Bonds was incorporated as a for-profit Minnesota corporation on May 28, 1998.

MSDB started with six original stockholders, and about 20 additional people have been stockholders for periods of time through the years. Stockholders have invested in MSDB both financially and, to an even greater degree, in volunteer effort.

One of MSDB's goals, and greatest accomplishments, is education. MSDB held classes in dungeon etiquette and training for dungeon masters because, as panel member Renae said, "This was all new and people just didn't know." Panel member Dan said that education was especially important when MSDB was formed: "In those days the community was smaller, but also it was younger in terms of experience. Most of us that had been around a year or two had a little more knowledge than the people who had been around a week or two. But everybody in the whole community was new to this."

MSDB
Minnesota Stocks, Debentures & Bonds

Image courtesy of MSDB

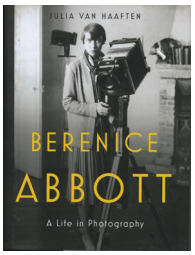
Probably the longest-lasting education endeavor of MSDB is The Lab, a monthly educational event that MSDB has been producing for over ten years. (The Lab was started in 2005 by another group called Erotic Deviance.) The Lab is both a safe place to learn and a good way to cultivate new speakers, presenters, and educators. Renee said she appreciated that MSDB "taught me things that I never would have known about. But they also taught me how to be safe about it, and to be careful, and what precautions to take, and about consent." Charger said that MSDB's educational efforts were "one of the things I worked on that I was most proud of when I left the board. And it's still going today."

MSDB also has quite a reputation for presenting amazing fetish parties and events. Recurring themes have included the Bizarre Bazaar for kinky Christmas shopping, the Taxing Play Party in mid-April, the Zombie Prom, and A Midsummer Night's Scream. MSDB has presented parties in notable venues such as Patrick's Cabaret and First Avenue, as well as in warehouses, hotels and motels with swimming pools and themed suites, theaters, barns and a converted church. People still talk about these MSDB parties ten or fifteen years later. As Renae put it, "A lot of great friendships came out of those parties."

MSDB has been able to combine education and partying by creating weekend-long events with nationally known educational presenters. Jay Wiseman, Lee Harrington, Dossie Eastman, Deborah Addington, Fakir Musafar, Cléo DuBois, Joanne Gaddy, and M. Christian are some of the dozen or so presenters that MSDB has brought to the Twin Cities.

Twenty years after its founding, MSDB's The Lab continues to educate every month, and MSDB continues to throw great kink parties and events. The best way to keep up with what's being discussed at The Lab, as well as with MSDB's monthly munches and other events, is through the MSDB group on Fetlife.com. ∎

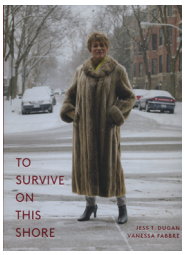
BOOKS | BY E.B. BOATNER



Berenice Abbott: A Life in Photography

Julia Van Haaften
Norton
$45

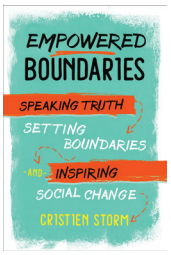
A satisfying, exquisitely detailed portrait of photographer Berenice Abbott (1898-1991). Born in Ohio into a chaotic, peripatetic family, young Abbott herself was quirky, rebellious. She escaped as soon as she could to Greenwich Village and thence to Paris where she was introduced to photography through Man Ray, and known for her efforts to rescue the oeuvre of Eugene Atget. Abbot was also a teacher, an inventor, a very private person who lived over 30 years with art critic Elizabeth McCausland. Abbott photographed "everyone" in the 1920s, Joyce, Gide, Duchamp, Barnes; later produced scientific photos through MIT, always eschewing anything "arty." If you don't know Abbott, search "Night View", taken with her wooden view camera from atop the new Empire State Building, and go from there.



To Survive on this Shore

Jess T. Dugan and Vanessa Fabbre
Kehrer Verlag
$55

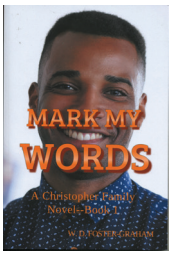
Photographer Dugan (*Every Breath We Drew*) and social worker Fabbre were five years creating this volume, interviewing and photographing 56 older–50 to 90–trans and gender-nonconforming adults. Covering the United States, they sought respondents within "complex intersections" of gender identity, race, ethnicity, socio-economic class and location. The subject's own words accompany their portraits: Gloria, 70, stands proud on the cover; Miss Major, 74, experienced Stonewall; Jay, 59 (now deceased) faced discrimination within the medical system. The respondents' age and range of experience offer valuable insights not only for the general reader, but to young trans individuals questioning their own futures. A substantial interview following text and portraits describes the authors' process in detail. The portraits are refreshingly large, each nearly 8.5 x 11".



Empowered Boundaries: Speaking Truth, Setting Boundaries, and Inspiring Social Change

Cristien Storm
North Atlantic Books
$15.95

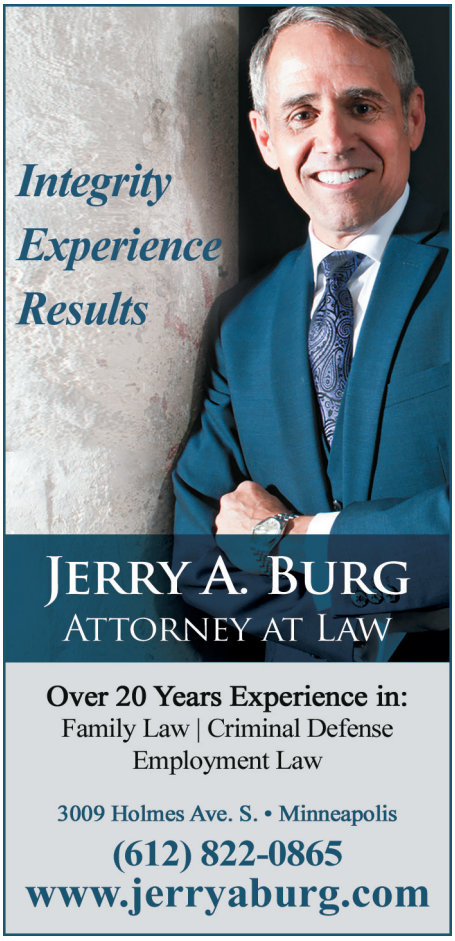
Boundaries are ubiquitous and essentially political; one's activity can set limits, while inactivity allows a boundary to expand. Changing and evolving, boundaries are our "communication of what we want and don't want", and may invite some in, as well as keep others out. After defining, Storm leads the reader into learning to how to set boundaries, much of which stems from strengthening communication skills that open avenues for negotiation. Simple steps, like "Name the Behavior", either aloud or to oneself, center and help indicate what actions to take next. Seemingly simple steps, but as Storm explains, they clarify the problem, pointing the way to rectify it. Storm is cofounder of Home Alive and of the Seattle-based If You Don't They Will, and a mental health therapist.



Mark My Words: A Christopher Family Novel-Book 1

W.D. Foster-Graham
Author House
$20.99

Chicago, 1988. Family patriarch, Allan Beckley Christopher, will soon celebrate a birthday. Happily married forty years to Maureen Moore Christopher, they've raised eight children. A childhood tinkerer—Little Mr. Fixit—Allan became an electrician, parleying that into his lucrative Christopher Electronics. We first see him in his "fortress of solitude", fast within his 30-room estate, pondering "sixty", the years he will attain on this birthday. From the outside, we see a golden life; fond husband and father, wealth, his dreams realized. But, in this and the following three volumes, his live is viewed through the lenses of other family members, including Maureen and four GLBT children. Is there more to learn? Well, if you were raised in a family, you know very well there is. ∎



Capt. Tyler Bieniek, left, has been married to his husband Thom, right, for seven years. Photo courtesy of Tyler Bieniek

To Serve And Have Pride

In the wake of the 2011 repeal of the Clinton-era "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy—wherein openly gay, lesbian and bisexual Americans were banned from serving in the United States military—American society's views of gay people serving openly in the Armed Forces have evolved, largely for the better. In addition to citizens expressing increasing support for the rainbow community members in uniform, the military itself has made considerable overtures in accepting gay soldiers into their fold.

While many gay soldiers today have been able to enlist while open about their sexuality, many service members who served during the days of DADT have had markedly different experiences and, in many cases, struggles.

Capt. Tyler Bieniek knows this story all too well. Currently Captain Promotable in the Training Support Unit at Camp Ripley for the Minnesota National Guard, Bieniek is out and proud, but it wasn't always that way.

"I decided to join the Army National Guard in my junior year of college," said Bieniek, who grew up in Little Falls, which is coincidentally the home of Camp Ripley. "It was actually a pretty difficult time in my life. I hadn't really accepted myself as being gay and so I was kind of rudderless in school. I didn't really know what I wanted to do as a profession and I was struggling to understand who I was."

Bieniek's father was a veteran of the Vietnam War, and Tyler chose to follow in his footsteps by contacting a National Guard recruiter in 1999—five years after the enactment of DADT.

"I was terrified of the thought of being labelled as gay," said Bieniek. "I rather envy the individuals that knew they were gay early in life. It took me a long time to accept myself for who I am and get over the fear that I would be an outcast. It wasn't until my junior year of college that I began to fully comprehend why I felt differently than most of my male friends, and I did not react to that realization well."

Bieniek said that in a way, joining the National Guard was a means of escaping the reality of who he really was. However, Bieniek came to become friends with a lesbian soldier who he said helped him through this difficult period of his life.

"It was a couple of years later that I finally decided that I couldn't live in secret anymore and I came out to my family," said Bieniek. "At first, there was that initial shock and realization that what we had all dreamed would be our future was going to be a little different. But my family was amazing. I consider myself so fortunate to have my parents and sisters in my life."

Capt. Tyler Bieniek currently serves as a Logistics Plans and Operations Officer at Camp Ripley. Photo courtesy of Tyler Bieniek

Capt. Tyler Bieniek, right, served in the U.S. military during the days of Don't Ask, Don't Tell, and was forced to hide his sexuality until its 2011 repeal. Photo courtesy of Tyler Bieniek

Due to federal policy at the time, Bieniek still kept his sexuality close to the vest, filtering out any references to his personal life in conversations during his mobilization and deployment. Luckily, Bieniek said that following the repeal of DADT, the Minnesota National Guard was extremely positive in embracing diversity as a strength.

"(That) is a change for an organization that prizes uniformity," said Bieniek. "The leaders in the organization have actively embraced the GLBT soldiers in the ranks and have tried to create an environment that visibly recognizes individuals in the ranks."

Prior to and following the repeal, however, Bieniek has maintained a decorated career with the National Guard, serving at Fort Hood from 2004 to 2005.

"Then in 2009, I was deployed overseas to Afghanistan with a medium truck company," said Bieniek. "Our job was to operate logistical convoys in southern Helmand province to deliver supplies to new and developing Forward Operating Bases. That was the period of time during Operation Enduring Freedom, when the Joint Forces were pushing heavily into Taliban territory to root them out of their strongholds."

Today, Bieniek is a Captain Promotable at Camp Ripley, and is in the approval process to ascend to the rank of Major. He serves as a Logistics Plans and Operations Officer, overseeing logistical support requirements for the unit, whose main mission is to offer support to the Norwegian Troop Exchange. On top of that, he's happily married to his husband of seven years, Thom. The couple have been together since Tyler's deployment to Afghanistan.

"He has only recently started to attend military events with me as my spouse, so it is still relatively new to him," said Bieniek. "For the first time he really feels like he has a connection with the military, which is so relieving for me. I had shared stories with him and tried to teach him about rank structure and what different jobs mean, but until you are able to actually meet people and put faces to names, it is not very easy to connect."

And as the military continues to accept queer folk, Bieniek believes that acceptance is the new normal at home too.

"I think the Minnesota National Guard has done a remarkable job of creating an environment of inclusion," said Bieniek. "That really stems from the efforts of the entire U.S. military, but Minnesota in particular has done a lot to ensure GLBT soldiers can serve openly and benefit from the same support that they give all military families."

So what would Bieniek say to gay youth hoping to serve their country, but are reluctant due to their sexuality?

"I would say I understand their apprehension, but that they have an opportunity that many GLBT soldiers before them never had," said Bieniek. "Many people could not understand why I would put myself at risk, personally or professionally, when I had to hide who I was. I would tell them that I felt pride in what I did. I felt like I was making a difference, regardless of the struggle. That is what I would want GLBT people to see in themselves, that they have the ability and strength to be leaders." ∎

OUR RIDES | BY RANDY STERN | PHOTOS BY RANDY STERN

2019 Volkswagen Jetta

One of our favorite cars is all new for 2019.

The popular Volkswagen Jetta is a fixture in our community. For the past 39 years, the sedan version of the Rabbit/Golf has served us well, giving us a sporty-looking and -feeling car to be proud in. Each Jetta offered an air of affordable prestige—something that is German with all the trappings of upward mobility in a compact-sized package.

It is no wonder why we in the GLBT community continue to own Jettas. This new one should be no exception.

To find out more about the 2019 Jetta, we talked to Travis Brockman at Luther Burnsville Volkswagen to see how it will fit our lifestyle. But first, Brockman pointed out what the new Jetta was really all about.

"I would say that if you are looking for some of the best of value you can get out there, as far as bang for your buck is concerned, the Jetta would definitely be the way to go," said Brockman. "In the compact class, it has more standard features than either Civic or Corolla, and also starts at a lower price point than the both of those. The fuel economy is amazing, and there's plenty of options for you to be able to, you know, customize it to your liking as well."

But, who is buying the new 2019 Jetta? Brockman told us that "it's a huge spectrum of customers." He cited one instance where a customer traded a very powerful Golf R for one, another swapped a Golf GTI coming off a lease for another. "He wanted something that was a little bit better on gas," Brockman explains. "This [Jetta] gets up to 40 miles per gallon on the highway, so he decided to go with the new Jetta this time instead."

Brockman also mentioned that both loyal customers and "conquests" (a term used in the automotive retail business of customers trading in a vehicle from another brand) have been taking delivery of the new Jetta. Brockman explains the reason why one should *#BettaGettaJetta*: "They're going to definitely want to know about passenger room and cargo room, which is very important, and it's got one of the largest trunks in its class. Obviously, they're going to want to know about the warranty. I think they'll want to to know about the standard features that it has over the other vehicles in its class. And probably safety, which it's always been a top pick for safety. So, we're continuing on still in that same direction."

Brockman is perhaps right about the new 2019 Jetta. We really like its new look. From its larger front grille to the sculptured lines flowing to the rear, the Jetta is very contemporary and quite handsome. Our readers have pointed that the Jetta compares in design to the current Honda Civic, which is edgier compared to the Volkswagen.

Inside, the materials have been upgraded compared to the previous model, including soft touch areas above the interior's belt line. We love the Digital Cockpit that came in our SEL Premium tester. This is a fully customizable TFT screen that encompasses more than just the instrumentation. Similar to Audi's Virtual Cockpit, you can bring in the navigation screen to full resolution, while you get key readouts in digits instead of dials.

Seating for four is achieved in a cabin that was increased over the last generation. Four average adults will have no problem enjoying the ride inside the Jetta. Plus, trunk space is very generous, with 14.1 cubic feet to stuff everything inside of it. There is a bit of a higher lip for roller luggage to manage, but the space itself goes deep. The rear seats fold down in a 60/40 split for longer loads.

Under the hood is a 1.4-liter turbocharged TSI engine. This 147 horsepower four-cylinder feels as it has much more power than the ratings tell us. Our tester has an 8-speed automatic transmission which was smooth and efficient. We averaged an astonishing 37.5 MPG in our care.

Travis Brockman with a 2019 Volkswagen Jetta R-Line

If there is one thing that stood out in the Jetta, it's the suspension. Not only does the Jetta rides smoothly—not too taut nor too soft—it takes on corners with confidence and authority. The brakes are superb with excellent pedal feedback and feel. The steering system offers a solid turning radius with great wheel feedback.

The 2019 Jetta is also a great value in its class. Starting price for the S model with manual transmission is $18,545—about the same price as the outgoing 2018 S model. Our SEL Premium tester came with a sticker price of $27,795.

If there is one major reason to consider the Jetta above all competitors, it is the new People First warranty. Volkswagen warranties their 2019 Jetta for six years or 72,000 miles from bumper to bumper.

"[The People First Warranty] is going to cover all of your major components if something goes wrong with it in that timeframe," explains Brockman. "One thing that I think is very awesome about this is that should you choose to finance your car for an entire six years and pay for it that entire time, you actually have the opportunity to have it under warranty all of that time, whereas most other cars typically, by the time you get to four years at the most, your warranty's ending, and then you still may have another year or two that you're paying a note on it."

In other words, Volkswagen offers the absolute best new vehicle warranty in the automotive business. They also built a superb sedan that goes along with this warranty. The 2019 Jetta is the finest expression of a journey that has spanned four decades in engaging American customers to its most charming product. It will continue be one of our favorite sedans, too! ▮

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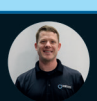

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OUR VOICES

SKIRTING THE ISSUES | BY ELLEN KRUG

Erasure

Have you heard about the referendum in Massachusetts to strip people of color of the right to use public accommodations without fearing discrimination—places such as restaurants, libraries, hotels, malls, public transportation services, and bathrooms and locker rooms?

Or did you know that parents of school-aged children in Minnesota are being warned of the "trend" that more and more children are identifying as being "of color" and of the need to prevent that from happening?

Shocking, isn't it? Targeting a distinct minority in our society simply because of how they identify must be illegal, right?

Yes, it would most definitely be illegal if I was really talking about people of color.

However, it's an entirely different case if the minority in question is transgender humans—which both above scenarios actually involve.

Why is that so? Not that I want to be melodramatic, but how in the world is it acceptable to target—even erase—a group of humans out of public existence?

In less than two weeks, Massachusetts voters will weigh in on a referendum proposition dubbed "Question 3," about whether voters should jettison a part of that state's GLBT-protective statute that prohibits public accommodation discrimination based on gender identity. As of late September (when I write this), more than 70 percent of Massachusetts voters favor keeping the law, thus protecting trans people in public. We'll see if that percentage holds. (My fingers are crossed.)

Yet, it doesn't address the troubling question of why it's okay to put to a vote whether to erase me from appearing in public in Massachusetts, a state where I am licensed to practice law and where I once lived for nearly nine years.

And the attempt at erasing transgender humans continues closer to home.

In late May, the pastors of eight churches in Hastings issued a letter in response to that city council's proclamation that Hastings would be welcoming to all people regardless of skin color, socioeconomic standing, country of origin, religion, or sexual or gender identification. The churches' letter, while applauding efforts to make the city "welcome to all," made it clear that there's one group their congregations don't welcome—transgender humans. Their position is that "transgenderism" is "needlessly confusing children and teens in our public schools."

Again, let's erase transgender people. It's so much easier than getting to know us and learning that we're just like you, with the same wants and fears. (Although, one can surmise that most people don't fear being erased.)

More recently, the religious-oriented Minnesota Family Council issued a 74-page "Parent Resource Guide" titled "Educating and Equipping Parents on the Transgender Trend." The guide calls for parents to resist any effort to make schools more welcoming to students who identify as trans or gender nonconforming.

The guide claims that "(s)tudents as young as kindergarten are being taught that changing sex is as easy as changing clothes…" It further asserts that, "(t)he transgender trend is grounded in the nonsensical 'gender ideology' theory, which claims that human identity is unrelated to the body."

(A side note to older gay and lesbian readers: you may recall that just twenty years ago, this was the argument made against you—that one's sexual identity couldn't be separated from one's body, meaning that biology dictated that boys couldn't like boys or girls like girls. We of course know that's just not true.)

The aforementioned guide seeks to arm parents with tools to fight the "transgender trend" at their schools. If they take up the call, those parents will disregard that being transgender is a real thing, and in the process, they'll marginalize—wait, let me make it abundantly clear, grievously harm—kids struggling to understand their gender identity. For trans kids, there isn't anything worse than hearing, "Jumping on that darn transgender band wagon simply means you're confused. Ignore your feelings and pray for guidance."

As I've written here before, I can take the attempts are erasing me and trans people my age. I'm older, more resilient, and have perspective that trans or gender nonconforming adolescents and teens lack. They're the ones who suffer because of all of this. It's reflected in our attempted suicide rate (40 times the rate for cisgender people) and rates of depression and addiction—which are through the roof.

Frankly, this erasing stuff is appalling.

It's also not very smart or well thought out.

Proponents of Question 3 in Massachusetts, please consider this: if you win, my only "legal" public bathroom option might be the men's restroom. Not that I'm a raving beauty, but I'm also not someone utterly unattractive. I love men and know quite well what turns men on. Remember, I used to present as a man myself.

Do you really want me in the restroom with your husband or boyfriend?

Just asking. ∎

Ellen (Ellie) Krug is the author of Getting to Ellen: A Memoir about Love, Honesty and Gender Change *(2013). She speaks and trains on diversity and inclusion topics; visit www.elliekrug.com where you can also sign up for her newsletter, The Ripple. She welcomes your comments at ellenkrugwriter@gmail.com.*

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